

# St. Petersburg Times

## More water near Coronet phosphate plant tested for pollutants: [LATE TAMPA Edition]

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### Abstract (Article Summary)

Federal officials ordered the pollution probe in June, in the wake of a nine-page report by state authorities that repeated residents' fears about cancer and other illnesses in two communities, Springhead and predominantly black Lincoln Park. A battery of health and environmental agencies is now focused on Coronet, a company with a spotty environmental record, and two closed municipal landfills northwest of the plant. A final report is expected next summer.

Coronet's wells. State officials expect results next week from eight monitoring wells installed last month on the south end of Coronet property. These wells could signal whether groundwater pollution is moving toward homes.

Landfill tests. County officials are gearing up for soil and groundwater tests at the landfills northwest of Coronet. Both were operated in the 1950s and 1960s and are of particular concern to Lincoln Park residents.

### Full Text (714 words)

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Authorities began a second round of well tests near Coronet Industries on Wednesday, combing for clues to what many residents believe is a massive environmental crime.

The suspect: Coronet's aging phosphate plant.

The evidence needed to make a case: pollutants.

"We're actually trying to find if they're in the area," said Hillsborough County Health Department director Doug Holt.

In coming weeks, investigators will sift through other clues.

They'll also be taking hits from civil rights groups that raised questions Wednesday about the investigation's integrity.

Federal officials ordered the pollution probe in June, in the wake of a nine-page report by state authorities that repeated residents' fears about cancer and other illnesses in two communities, Springhead and predominantly black Lincoln Park. A battery of health and environmental agencies is now focused on Coronet, a company with a spotty environmental record, and two closed municipal landfills northwest of the plant. A final report is expected next summer.

Health officials say there is no evidence of increased cancer rates, or proof that harmful amounts



of pollution are blowing or seeping into residential areas. But faced with widespread anxiety, they won't give definitive answers without more data.

That's where the well tests come in.

The first round of tests, taken last month, made residents even more nervous.

Of 43 private wells tested within a quarter of a mile of the plant, one showed elevated levels of arsenic, a cancer-causing metal found in phosphate and pesticides, and nine showed higher levels of boron, a substance that can cause stomach ailments. Authorities deemed the health risks low, but passed out bottled water and took urine samples.

They say it's too early to pin blame. Boron is a byproduct at Coronet, which turns mountains of phosphate into an additive for chicken feed. But boron can also be found in some fertilizers.

The tests that began Wednesday include another 50 wells within a quarter-mile of the plant. Results are expected in two weeks.

The water will be tested for metals, fluoride, boron and pollutants associated with oil and gasoline - all potential toxins found on the Coronet site.

Because the investigation is focused on Coronet, the wells will not be tested for pesticides, the health department's Greg Rottler said, even though surrounding land is dotted with strawberry farms and old orange groves.

Depending on what authorities find, more wells could be tested.

Meanwhile, investigators will be looking at other factors, including:

Radionuclides. They should know within a week whether area wells are tainted with these substances, which are slightly radioactive. Radionuclides are found naturally, but elevated levels have been linked to the phosphate industry.

Coronet's wells. State officials expect results next week from eight monitoring wells installed last month on the south end of Coronet property. These wells could signal whether groundwater pollution is moving toward homes.

Air pollution monitors. County officials expect results next week from three new monitors installed last week in neighborhoods around the plant. The results will be given to county health officials for analysis.

Soil tests. Nearly two dozen samples were taken recently in residential areas around the plant. They could shed light on whether air pollution from the plant is accumulating where people live.

Landfill tests. County officials are gearing up for soil and groundwater tests at the landfills northwest of Coronet. Both were operated in the 1950s and 1960s and are of particular concern to Lincoln Park residents.

Two civil rights groups say any results will be suspect.

In a conference call with federal officials Wednesday, they accused state and local agencies of being too cozy with the phosphate industry and asked the Environmental Protection Agency to assume control of the investigation.

"This has been an egregious facility for a long time and (state and local officials) haven't done anything," said Connie Tucker, director of the Southern Organizing Committee for Economic and Social Justice in Atlanta.

Also participating in the call: the Rev. Johnnie Cooper, a Lincoln Park resident who heads the local chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. It was Cooper whose plea to federal authorities earlier this year helped launch the current investigation.

Tucker said her group is considering ways to nudge the EPA into a more active role, "including civil disobedience."

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